

**TEL Broadcast – Effective Interpretive Writing
Interpretive Development Program
May 9, 2008 12:00-4:00 PM EDT
Participant Materials**

(TEL POC's -- please make sure that participants at your site receive this information)

Contents of this packet:

I. Writing examples that will be used in the broadcast – please print these and have them with you on the day of the broadcast:

Example #1 – *The Great American Desert* (2 pages)

Example #2 – *Sample Techniques* (3 pages)

Example #3 – *Leaving Home Version 1* (1 page)

Example #4 – *Leaving Home Version 2* (1 page)

II. Links to pre-session reading assignments – we recommend that you review these materials prior to attending the broadcast:

Foundations of Interpretation

http://www.eppley.org/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=40&products_id=32

The Interpretive Process Model

<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/ProcessMod.doc>

Opportunities for Intellectual and Emotional Connections

<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/ConnectionOps.doc>

Interpretive Themes

<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/themes.pdf>

III. Links to other useful references – explore on your own:

Handles – A Survey of Interpretive Techniques

<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/handlesupdate.pdf>

Interpretive Writing Developmental Worksheet

<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/230/230wrksheet.pdf>

NPS Editorial Style Guide

<http://www.nps.gov/hfc/pdf/nps-style-guide.pdf>

Interpretive Writing Online Course

<http://www.parktraining.org/>

NOTE: If you are not familiar with the foundational material of the IDP, we recommend a review of the *Foundations of Interpretation* free on-line course at the web link above.

Or you may wish to review this material in-depth in the workbook entitled “Meaningful Interpretation,” edited by David Larsen. Each park received a copy of this book in 2004. The following link contains information about purchasing additional copies:
<http://www.easternnational.org/meaningful.htm>

The Great American Desert

If you're thinking of a visit (to the desert), my natural reaction is like a rattlesnake's — to warn you off. What I want to say goes something like this.

Survival Hint #1: Stay out of there. Don't go. Stay home and read a good book, this one for example. The Great American Desert is an awful place. People get hurt, get sick, get lost out there. Even if you survive, which is not certain, you will have a miserable time. The desert is for movies, not for family recreation. It has been said, and truly, that everything in the desert either stings, stabs, stinks, or sticks. You will find the flora here as venomous, hooked, barbed, thorny, prickly, needled, saw-toothed, hairy, stickered, mean, bitter, sharp, wiry, and fierce as the animals. Something about the desert inclines all living things to harshness and acerbity. The soft evolve out. Except for sleek and oily growth like the poison ivy — oh yes, indeed — that flourish in sinister profusion on the dank walls above the quicksand down in those corridors of gloom and labyrinthine monotony that men call canyons.

... Now what about desert hiking itself, you may ask. I'm glad you asked that question. I firmly believe that one should *never* — I repeat never — go out into that formidable wasteland of cactus, heat, serpents, rock, scrub, and thorn without careful planning, thorough and cautious preparation, and *complete* — never mind the expense! — equipment. My motto is: Be Prepared. That is my belief and that is my motto. My practice, however, is a little different.

... Anyway — why go into the desert? Really, why do it? That sun roaring at you all day long. The fetid, tepid, vapid little water holes slowly evaporating under a scum of grease, full of cannibal beetles, spotted toads, horsehair worms, liver flukes, and down at the bottom, inevitably, the pale cadaver of a ten-inch centipede. Those pink rattlesnakes down in The Canyon, those diamondback monsters thick as a truck driver's wrist that lurk in shady places along the trail, those unpleasant and unnecessary Jerusalem crickets that scurry on dirty claws across your face at night. Why? Why the desert, when you could be strolling along the golden beaches of California? Camping by a stream of pure Rocky Mountain spring water in colorful Colorado? Loafing through a laurel slick in the misty hills of North Carolina? Why the desert, given a world of such splendor and variety?

(On one trip to Coconino County, Arizona), I entered the canyon and followed it for half the afternoon, for three or four miles, maybe, until it became a gorge so deep, narrow and dark, full of water and the inevitable quagmires of quicksand, that I turned around and looked for a way out. A route other than the way I'd come, which was crooked and uncomfortable and buried — I wanted to see what was up on top of this world. I found a sort of chimney flue on the east wall, which looked plausible, and sweated my way up through that until I reached a point where I could walk upright, like a human being. Another 300 feet of scrambling brought me to the rim of the canyon. No one, I felt certain, had ever before departed Nasja Canyon by that route.

But someone had. Near the summit I found an arrow sign, three feet long, formed of stones and pointing off into the north toward those same old purple vistas, so grand, immense, and mysterious, of more canyons, more mesas, and plateaus, more mountains, more cloud-dappled sun-spangled leagues of desert sand and desert rock, under the same old wide and aching sky.

The arrow pointed into the north. But what was it pointing *at*? I looked at the sign closely and saw that those dark, desert-varnished stones had been in place for a long, long, time; they rested in

compacted dust. They must have been there for a century at least. I followed the direction indicated and came promptly to the rim of another canyon and a drop-off straight down of a good 500 feet. Not that way, surely. Across this canyon was nothing of any unusual interest that I could see — only the familiar sun-blasted sandstone, a few scrubby clumps of blackbrush and prickly pear, a few acres of nothing where only a lizard could graze, surrounded by a few square miles of more nothingness interesting chiefly to the horned toads. I returned to the arrow and checked again, this time with field glasses, looking away for as far as my aided eyes could see toward the north, for ten, twenty, forty miles into the distance. I studied the scene with care, looking for an ancient Indian ruin, a significant cairn, perhaps an abandoned mine, a hidden treasure of some inconceivable wealth, the mother of all mother lodes.

But there was nothing out there. Nothing at all. Nothing but the desert. Nothing but the silent world. *That's why.*

Edward Abbey

The Journey Home: Some words in defense of the American West

Sample Techniques

Diatomaceous Earth

Diatomaceous earth, by the way, isn't dirt. It's a remarkable substance made up of the jagged silicon skeletons of thousands of tiny sea creatures. It feels to a human hand like talc, but to insects it's like rolling on broken bottles. It lacerates their skin so the vital juices leak out. This is a fearful way to die, I'm sure, but as I sprinkled the white powder around the leaves on that spring day I wasn't thinking about the insects. I was thinking of eggplants, heavy and purple-black in the midsummer sun. I believe that try as we might to see it differently, life nearly always comes down to choices like this. There is always a price.

Barbara Kingsolver, *Homeland and other stories*

Mountain Streams

In approaching these declivities the streams quicken their pace, anticipating perhaps the adventure of leaving behind the scenes wherein their fortunes have hitherto been laid; finally, roaring in high excitement, each hurls itself headlong through one exultant leap after another down toward the valley below. More composedly but nonetheless with eager course, they then move away from the mountains and across the flats of Jackson Hole to mingle their waters and destinies with those of the Snake.

Fritiof Fryxell, *The Tetons: Interpretations of a Mountain Landscape*

Hawaii Volcanoes

I forgot to say that the noise made by the bubbling lava is not great, heard as we heard it from our lofty perch. It makes three distinct sounds — a rushing, a hissing, and a coughing or puffing sound; and if you stand on the brink and close your eyes it is no trick at all to imagine that you are sweeping down a river on a large low-pressure steamer, and that you hear the hissing of the steam about her boilers, the puffing from her escape-pipes and the churning push of the water abaft her wheels. The smell of sulphur is strong, but not unpleasant to a sinner.

Marc Twain, *The Hawaii Volcanoes*

Ride the Rockies

If you are normal and philosophical; if you love your country; if you like bacon or will eat it anyhow; if you are willing to learn how little you count in the eternal scheme of things; if you are prepared, for the first day or two to be able to locate every muscle in you body and a few extra ones that have apparently crept in and are crowding — go ride in the Rocky Mountains and save your soul.

Mary Roberts Rinehart, *Ride the Rockies and Save Your Soul*

Phoenix Falling

This is not the first time unchecked growth has filled the Valley of the Sun. If you lift the rug of Phoenix, buried directly below you will find the remains of an ancient city, a Neolithic version of Phoenix. The first communities appeared in the low basin of the Salt River 3,000 years ago, as shown by remains recently discovered under the new Phoenix Convention Center. From there, prehistoric settlements took an escalation course of empire, filling the basin to overflowing. They sprawled all the way south to Tucson, while satellite communities appeared even north of Flagstaff. They grew until they were no longer able to sustain themselves. Then, their civilization fell.

When Anglo settlers arrived shortly after the American Civil War, they found a desert studded with grand adobe ruins, vestiges of an inexplicable culture. They called their new settlement Phoenix, imagining themselves rising from the ashes of a lost city. Wherever the settlers dug canals, they unearthed the remains of Hohokam canals below. For the next 150 years, engineers planned new canals throughout this growing city, and nearly each one follows an original Hohokam grid, as if pouring water back into an ancient hydraulic empire, bringing a ghost to life. Communities sprang up in the same places that Hohokam settlements once stood. The two cities lie along similar environmental trajectory, and they may face a similar end.

Craig Childs, Phoenix Falling

Humble is the Prey

The carcass of a freshly killed goat flies through the air, cartwheeling upward and outward over the heads of a phalanx of tourists. Ninety pounds of inert protein, it ascends toward its apogee bearing the weight of a ponderous question: Is there a place in the world for the great flesh-eating predators that make no distinction between goat, deer, and human?

It rises through the hot tropical air above a deep gully, and my attention, until now diverted elsewhere, shifts to fix on it. “The goat,” says a voice in my brain. “I didn’t realize that they’d *throw* it.” Spotlit by shafts of sunlight penetrating the tamarind trees, it floats through a backward somersault. For an instant it hangs. We tourists, all seventy-some, gape. On one level, what’s being offered is just bait. On another, it’s a proxy for ourselves. And then the goat falls. It lands with a meaty wallop on bare dirt.

Nine giant reptiles pile onto it like NFL linemen.

Nine giant reptiles snarf and gobble. They chomp. They gorge. They trash, they scuffle, they tug and twist. They stir up one hellacious ruckus. ...

It’s Sunday on the island of Komodo, and I’ve come here to ask the ponderous question: can humanity live with dragons?

Can we live without them? What will we lose from the wild places on Earth — from our sense of the word *wild* itself — when we lose all prospect of being devoured by homicidal beasts?

David Quammen, Humble is the Prey

Rock of Ages

In the outback regions of the Colorado Plateau, time stands nearly still. Year by year, erosion lightly planes the mesas and deepens the canyons; a wet year thickens the sparse grasses and a dry year withers them. But the sea of painted rock covering vast stretches of Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado remains much as it was before the pioneers, before the Spanish conquistadores, before the first immigrants to the New World.

Shift your timescale from the human to the geologic, though, and the story of these corrugated rockscapes isn't scant change but vast change, hundreds of millions of years of it. Geologists often speak of deep time, the great spans over which the subtlest forces can remake a landscape. The canyon lands are a textbook of deep time.

Mark Edwards, Rock of Ages, National Geographic

Leaving Home

Version One

As he stood on the train platform, all eyes on him, Abraham Lincoln struggled to find the words to express all he was feeling at this emotional goodbye. Perhaps he was thinking back to that fateful election night in November. Reflecting on how that night of nervousness and celebration had changed everything about his life, and life of those who had come to see him on his way.

Abraham Lincoln's election to the presidency had caused the eyes of the nation to turn towards the quiet town of Springfield, Illinois. A whirlwind of activity had seemed to constantly surround Mr. Lincoln's normally peaceful home. Where once there had been time for a husband and wife to lounge and indulge in quiet conversation, now everything was rushed and hurried. In the rooms where 3 of his children had been born, crowds of well wishers and office seekers had now waited for their turn with "President Lincoln." At night the streets were bathed by torchlight as parades of well wishers marched up and down the streets surrounding his comfortable home.

But it was an angrier, more hateful, torchlight that filled the streets of Charleston, Atlanta, New Orleans, and other cities in the Deep South. Torches in these towns were thrust into straw mannequins dressed like the self-educated lawyer from Illinois. Speeches rallying against Lincoln and his "Black Republican" ideals brought cheers from the crowd as the future president's effigy was consumed by fire.

And now, standing on the back of a train bound for Washington D.C., Abraham Lincoln was nearly ready to leave his home and Springfield. As he and Mary had gone over their final to-do list, they had discussed what it meant that seven southern states had already voted to secede from the country. Mary (perhaps blinded by pride) simply couldn't understand how anyone could hate her darling husband. Mr. Lincoln himself held onto the thin hope that cooler heads might still prevail, but he had also begun to plan for the horrific aftermath if they did not.

A crowd of people had turned out to see the President-elect go. These were the people who had supported and encouraged him. These were the people who had witnessed firsthand his rise in law and politics. There were the people whose support he would still need. There were the people he least wanted to let down. With a few last words he turned his back on his friends and home, and headed into the great unknown future.

"My friends – no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being, who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him, who can go with me and remain with you and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

Matt D. Brown
Lincoln Home National Historic Site March 2004

Leaving Home

Version Two

Think about a time you left home for an extended period. Maybe you thought of the first time you spent the night at a friend's house or when you went away to college. Maybe it was when you relocated for a new job. Or perhaps it was a move to that perfect place to retire. Preparing to leave home often puts you in a seat on an emotional roller coaster full of unexpected twists and turns, thrilling climbs and terrifying plunges. There's the excitement of adventure, the frenzy of planning, the anxiety of the unknown, the sorrow of leaving. Abraham Lincoln surely rode that same roller coaster as he left his home here in Springfield.

Abraham Lincoln's election to the presidency had caused the eyes of the nation to turn towards the quiet town of Springfield, Illinois. A whirlwind of activity had seemed to constantly surround Mr. Lincoln's normally peaceful home. Where once there had been time for a husband and wife to lounge and indulge in quiet conversation, now everything was rushed and harried. In the rooms where he relaxed with his family, crowds of well wishers and office seekers waited for their turn with "President Lincoln." At night the streets were bathed by torchlight as parades of well wishers marched up and down the streets surrounding his comfortable home.

But there was an angrier, more hateful, torchlight that filled the streets of Charleston, Atlanta, New Orleans, and other cities in the Deep South. Torches in these towns were thrust into straw mannequins dressed like the self-educated lawyer from Illinois. Speeches rallying against Lincoln and his "Black Republican" ideals brought cheers from the crowd as the future president's effigy was consumed by red hot flames. Most likely a fear of losing their homelife as they knew it fueled some of these fires of hate.

Is there a specific moment that stands out from that time you left home? A hug from a parent, the final walk in your neighborhood, the last look before you closed the door? Perhaps you were feeling some of the same emotions as Abraham Lincoln when he left the back parlor where his sons were born or during his final descent of the stairs from which he had greeted so many visitors over the years. Lincoln's house stands as a symbol of the sense of home that is so important to all of us. As Abraham Lincoln stood on the back of the train that would take him to Washington D.C. he took a moment to share his thoughts. With a few last words to the crowd of people gathered to see him off, he captured the emotions he felt upon leaving his Springfield home.

"My friends – no one not in my situation can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being, who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him, who can go with me and remain with you and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."